RESEARCH FINDINGS

- The duration of short-term international assignments is between one to twelve months. Employers’ reasons for short-term international assignments are: skills transfer and problem solving, managerial control and management development (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).
- There are advantages and disadvantages of short-term assignments (Tahvanainen et al., 2005; Starr et al., 2009; Mayerhofer et al., 2004).
  - Advantages of short-term assignments for companies include:
    1. flexibility
    2. simplicity
    3. cost effectiveness
    4. shorter preparation time
  - Disadvantages of short-term assignments for assignees include:
    1. taxation
    2. side effects such as alcoholism and divorce
    3. difficulties in relationships with local colleagues and customers
    4. difficulty integrating into the local environment
    5. difficulty obtaining a work permit
    6. isolation and loneliness
    7. strain on the marital relationship
    8. spousal resentment about absence
    9. disruption to family relationships
    10. stress and fatigue
- In a survey by Pricewaterhouse Coopers in 2000/2001, only 12 percent of respondents mentioned stress and fatigue as disadvantages related to short-term assignments. The most commonly mentioned disadvantage was the difficulty integrating into the local workplace or community given the short duration of the assignment.
- For short-term assignments, families do not relocate. Thus, families are not typically involved when companies decide whether or not an employee is suitable or unsuitable for a short-term assignment. However, in a survey, four out of eleven companies sampled gave families the option to accompany the assignee and offered to pay all of the
associated costs. Very few assignees’ families took advantage of this opportunity. A short-term assignment is easier for families in certain ways since they do not relocate abroad. Thus, children do not have to switch schools and partners do not have to find a new job. (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

- Repatriation from short-term assignments may lead to potential problems. There may be unexpected difficulties with repatriation if there are changes within the company which cause an assignee’s previous position in the company to be altered or eliminated (Starr et al., 2009).

**IMPLICATIONS**

- Employees may choose to reject short-term assignments due to familial reasons, such as a desire to start a family or a responsibility to care for an ill or elderly extended family member. Employees with supportive spouses are more likely to accept short-term international assignments. (Starr et al., 2009)
- Due to the nature of their work, the commitment of short-term assignees to their work and their customers may be weaker than that of expatriates (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Especially for employees that are assigned to short-term international work repeatedly, it is challenging to successfully integrate into the home or abroad environments and to maintain positive relationships with co-workers, family members, and friends (Starr et al., 2009).
- The challenges of short-term assignments for HR are pre-departure training, compensation, performance management and repatriation.
- Pre-departure cross-cultural training is arguably more important for short-term assignees than for traditional international assignees due to the difficulties of integrating into the abroad workplace environment within a short period of time.

**WORKS CITED**

